



NECK PAIN GUIDE

Neck pain is extremely common. In fact, according to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS), spine injuries are the most prevalent musculoskeletal impairments, and 80% of Americans will suffer from a neck or back injury at some point in their life.

Common Causes

The neck is an integral part of daily movement. Because it is less protected than many other areas of the body, the neck can be extremely vulnerable to pain or injury.

Muscle tension/strain is one of the main causes of neck pain and is often times a result of overuse. Neck muscles can easily become fatigued, which creates tension that can lead to strain. Muscle strain can, in turn, result in a pulled muscle around the spine or a tear in small muscle fibers. Repeated overuse of your neck muscles can lead to chronic pain and stiffness in the neck.

Degenerative changes in the cervical spine may be due to aging, injury, or illness. As the disks of the spine age or encounter injury, they begin losing retained liquid. As a result, the neck loses its absorbing ability. As the disks continue to wear over time, they begin to collapse, affecting the way the joints fit together. Eventually this can lead to conditions such as pinched nerves, herniated disks, or arthritis of the neck joints. While arthritis will generally only cause muscle stiffness, both a pinched nerve and a herniated disk will often result in a combination of pain, weakness, and numbness in the affected area. It is important to remember that while degenerative changes will likely happen as our bodies age, not everyone will feel pain or encounter a problem.



General Anatomy

The neck is comprised of the top seven vertebra (called the cervical spine) that run from the base of the skull and to the upper torso. The neck also has a network of muscles, some of which extend down into the shoulders and back. The nerves that leave the cervical spine area feed into the upper extremities. Because the neck is so interconnected with other parts of the body, an untreated neck injury or impairment could result in headaches, arm/shoulder pain, numbness, tingling, and weakness.

Traumatic injury, such as an accident or fall, is another major cause of neck pain. Often times, the results are problems such as whiplash, blood vessel injury, vertebral fractures, or even paralysis.

Treatment

Minor neck pain may be treated in a variety of ways:

Rest your neck by limiting its use to allow time for any inflammation to decrease. Lying down throughout the day with your head and neck in a neutral position will give your neck a rest from holding your head.

Ice/Heat should be done to reduce inflammation and help with pain. Ice treatment is generally used for acute (short term) injuries to control swelling. Heat treatment may be used to treat chronic (long term) conditions; it is best if used prior to taking part in an activity that may aggravate the injured area to help relax and loosen the tissue.

Gentle stretching of the muscles around the injured area can often help neck pain. Try slow range of motion stretches. For example, move your head up and down and side to side. Avoid complete inactivity of the neck so you

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do not experience increased stiffness. Stretch only to the point of gentle tightness and stop immediately if you are in pain. Also, wearing a soft neck collar can help relax your neck muscles by relieving tension or strain.

Lifestyle adjustments can make a big difference in your neck pain as well. Adjusting or eliminating certain activities from your daily routine can make a big difference in how you feel. For example, try sleeping with a neck pillow or arrange your pillows so that your neck is in a neutral position. Also, refer to our “Posture in the Workplace” article in the Education Corner section of the Idaho Physical Therapy website for many helpful tips on how to avoid and correct neck pain in the workplace.

Pain that worsens or is due to a more serious condition should be diagnosed and treated by a medical professional.

The Next Step

Whether your neck pain is acute or chronic, it is a debilitating injury that affects all areas of your life. Seek help! Physical therapy can help to put you on the path to freedom from pain by helping you increase your strength, regain mobility and return you to your pre-injury activity level.

You don't have to live with neck pain. At **Idaho Physical Therapy**, our caring, professional, experienced therapists can help you achieve the fastest, most complete recovery possible. Call us today to book your free assessment - **(208) 463-0022!**

